



# THE SIKHS DEMAND

THE PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE OF  
SIR FREDERICK CURRIE  
1846—1848



THE  
PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE  

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OF SIR FREDERICK CURRIE  

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1846-1848

*Edited*  
*with Introduction and Notes by*  
JAGMOHAN MAHAJAN, M.A. (HONS.)

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THE SIKHS DEMAND  
THEIR

TO  
YUVRAJ KRISHNA  
AND  
RAM LAL SETHI



# THE SIKHS DEMAND THEIR

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to the Panjab University Historical Society for permission to publish in the present form an Article which appeared in the April 1947 issue of its *Journal*.

Lahore, 1947.

JAGMOHAN MAHAJAN.





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# THE SIKHS DEMAND THEIR

## THE PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE OF SIR FREDERICK CURRIE 1846-1848

### I. PROLOGUE

Some years ago a collection of important private correspondence addressed to Sir Frederick Currie (in his capacity first as the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India and then as the Resident at Lahore), dealing with the circumstances leading to the annexation of the Punjab, was offered for sale by some dealer in London. The collection was acquired by the Satara Historical Museum, from where it was later transferred to the Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute, Poona, where it is still preserved. The collection includes private and confidential letters, numbering about 400, from John Nicholson, Herbert Edwardes, Abbott, Napier, Lake, Viscounts Hardinge and Gough, and the Marquis of Dalhousie.

With the exception of the correspondence of Currie with Hardinge and Dalhousie, the letters in this collection mainly relate to the details—though quite important and hitherto unpublished—of the so-called Second Sikh War. But the correspondence of Currie with the successive Governors-General, which is published in the following pages, deals with fundamentals in British policy towards the Punjab. It reveals a sordid tale of unscrupulousness and duplicity whereby the British were able to write the Sikh kingdom off the map of India. The tragedy of the situation is heightened by the fact that in this case the British have succeeded in their attempt not only to suppress, but also to distort deliberately, the true facts; and the official view of the subject that it was a strange combination of circumstances and destiny that made the British step into the vacuum created by the death of Ranjit Singh, has come to stay. The facts brought to light by this correspondence, however, cast such a lurid light

on British diplomacy vis-a-vis the Sikhs and provide us with such severe shocks and disillusionings, that we are compelled to revise radically our conception of the events that led to the annexation of the Punjab.

## II. CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO THE TREATY OF BHYROWAL, DECEMBER 1846

### A. INTRODUCTION

By the supplementary articles of agreement concluded between the British Government and the Lahore Durbar on 11 March 1846, it was decided that the British force "shall not be detained at Lahore beyond the expiration of the current year." With the year drawing to its close, the time was fast approaching for the departure of the British troops from Lahore. Lord Hardinge, however, had for some time been contemplating the revision of this Treaty in such a direction as would make possible the retention of the British troops beyond the stipulated period together with the tightening of the British grip over the country, and would thus bring the Punjab virtually under the British control. To achieve his object he left no stone unturned. By the artifices of guarantees, rewards and threats, and by issuing instructions to Currie for making certain bogus military movements, Hardinge was able to force the Sikh Sardars to make a request to the British Government for the continuance in the Punjab of the British troops along with the Political Agent.

By the terms of the Treaty of Bhyrowal (December 1846) the British force was to remain at Lahore "for the protection of the Maharaja, and preservation of the peace of the country," until the Maharaja attained "the full age of 16 years, or on the 4th September of the year 1854," during which period the administration was to be run by a Council of Regency, composed of eight "leading chiefs and Sardars, acting under the control and guidance of the British Resident," who was to have "full authority to direct and control the duties of every department" and who

was to have "unlimited authority in all matters of internal administration and external relations during the Maharaja's minority." The Lahore State was to pay to the British Government twenty-two lakhs of rupces per annum, "for the maintenance of this force, and to meet the expenses incurred by the British Government." The Maharani was deprived of all power, and received as a solatium an annuity of one and a half lakhs of rupces.

Thus in the Bhyrowal treaty the duplicity practised by the British Government in India registered another great triumph, since in it the 'anxious desire' of the Governor-General for the continuance, in the Punjab, of the British troops along with the Political Agent was adroitly manœuvred to have the appearance of a 'request' emanating from the leading Sardars of the realm whose assent had previously been obtained by successful stratagems. The Maharani, the Regent for the minor Maharaja, whose opinion on the subject should have counted more than that of any other person, was studiously excluded from all participation in the negotiations which were to determine the destiny of her son, because she made an attempt to prevent the British octopus from extending its tentacles in the Punjab by rallying round her the leading Chiefs "in a scheme of independent Government," and thereby threatened to thwart the true intentions of the Governor-General. With characteristic hypocrisy, Hardinge wrote on 16 December 1846, to Currie (whom he had only four days ago asked "to persevere in your line of making the Sikh Durbar propose the condition or rather their readiness to assent to any conditions imposed as the price of the continuance of our support") as follows:—"The moral effect of the Sikh Chiefs *entreating* the B(ritish) Govt. to become the Guardian of their Prince, by the continuance of a British Garrison at Lahore, and our *consent* to undertake the responsible charge must be felt throughout Asia in raising the reputation and extending the influence of the B. character."<sup>1</sup>

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1. For a detailed discussion of the subject, see *The Treaty of Bhyrowal: December 1846—A Historical Revision*, by the present writer in the *Journal of Indian History*, December 1945, pp. 166—176.

## B. LETTERS

(1)<sup>2</sup>

Camp Kurtarpoor,  
*December 6th ('846),*  
 1 o'clock.

My dear Currie

I received yr. letter of the 4th this morning at 9 o'cl. I am well satisfied that all your proceedings have been regulated by prudence, justice and sound policy.

You were quite right to place Sir John Littler and Col. Goldie on the enquiry, and of the 3 modes which were open to you of constituting the Court you chose the best—in fact the only one which practically would have worked well.

The guilt of the Vizier being established, strengthens the necessity of our refusing to leave Br. troops in Lahore under a Native Govt.—the intrigues of a Vizier against the British Govt. which protected him and which alone enabled him to live in safety is a fact strongly illustrative of the insecurity and impolicy of such a system exclusive of those which belong to the Subsidiary system. The forbearance in not holding the state responsible for the act of its Vizier is a proof of the sincerity of our intentions and a useful prelude to the discussions now about to take place.

I will tell Edwards to send you a copy of my letter to the S. Cee.

I told Mrs. Currie to say yesterday that I approved of all that had been done—but was so occupied with my English letters that I had not time to write, and at dinner she told me the Dawk had left the camp at 4 o'cl. and had prevented her from delivering my message.

I am glad you took two days giving full time to the Raja to prepare his defence. Anything like precipitancy would have been mischievous. Your manner of disposing of his person was judicious. I suppose I shall receive your official report tomorrow morning.

---

2. The spellings, punctuation marks and abbreviations in this as well as all succeeding letters correspond exactly to those in the original correspondence.

The troops move this day to Kupurthulla, and tomorrow towards the Bridge. We ride in at once tomorrow morning.

I hope you found Lawrence none the worse for his exertions. I could ill afford to lose so able and energetic an officer. My best regards to the 2 Brothers.

Ever my dear Currie  
Yours very sincerely  
HARDINGE.

(2)

Camp at the Bridge across the Beas  
7th Decr. 1846.

My dear Currie

You have summed up so ably that I consider you entitled to be the Lord Chief Justice and Lawrence holding the great seal as the Lord Chancellor of India.

I think you have over-come all the difficulties, and I can perceive no flaw, unless the splitters of hairs infer that the Durbar are concerned, by the Seikh verdict of acquittal in certain cases "not proven."

As to the disposal of the Raja I have merely said that he must be handed over to our Pol. Offr. at Ferozpoor, and thence to some place in the interior.

If the Ranee is disposed to share his fortunes, there will be no difficulty in making a moderate provision for her support, but in any arrangement made for continuing the occupation of Lahore, her deprivation of power is an indispensable condition.

Lena S. Majitia as the tutor and superintendent of the Prince's education with the first place amongst the Natives in the Durbar, would be a useful ingredient.

I am in daily expectation of the Eng. Letters. They may continue a Whig scheme of Policy, but I hardly think there has been time . . . I shall congratulate Mrs. Currie on the dangers you have escaped.

Your letter only reached this camp at 11 this morning and had been to Jullundhur and elsewhere.

In a judicial case I have not ventured to convey thanks for the Service performed, but I feel you have managed this affair ably and justly and I anticipate a most satisfactory conclusion of the negotiation.

Yours very sincerely  
HARDINGE.



Camp Bhyrowall  
Dec. 10th 1846

My dear Currie

I have received your letters of the 6th and 8th and I hope at least that our communications will exceed  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles an hour which has hitherto been the average rate of speed.

I agree with you it will not be proper to accumulate political offices on Lawrence's brothers, although I am quite ready to take his Brothers services into consideration, as well on his own as the Lt. Col.'s assistant.

I think you will agree with me, that we must not exalt the importance of Lal Singh by escorting him to Benares and leaving him in charge of a Field Officer specially delegated for that purpose, whilst we have another Major on the spot who has in reality very little to do, and that little exerted in the wrong direction.

I would send Lal S. off to Ferozpoor in charge of Lt. Wroughton and thence to Agra in the first instance.

Major Carpenter might put a wrong construction on the paper which Lal S. has received from Lawrence recognising his services during the last campaign, and upon the whole I think Agra at first would answer better than Benares.

If we are to occupy Lahore, a Pol. Offr. will be reqd. at Peshawar, and if McGregor was not married, he ought to be sent there. I intend to appoint him to Benares when Major C. retires.

Captain Postans is seriously ill, and unable to proceed with the work. Is Captain Lawrence fit for this duty?

I will not enter upon the important question to which yr. letter of the 8th refers as you state it is yr. intention to write more fully on the subject.

I have not a doubt upon the subject. You are the person best qualified to ensure the success of a British Administration under novel and difficult circumstances in the Punjab and in such case I should place you on the same footing as the Lt. Govr., but I await your further explanations, merely adding that yr. reputation must be raised by your undertaking the task.

I have a very high opinion of Lawrence and next to yourself I prefer him.

I observe Col. Richmond has arrived at Calcutta. I do not imagine he intends to resign.

The papers relating to the Works at Bhurtpoor are at Simla and Edwards has sent for them.

I shall hear from Mr. Thomson in less than a week on the state of Col. Sutherland's mind.

*The coyness of the Durbar and the Sirdars is very natural ; but it is very important that the proposal should originate with them ; and in any documents proceeding from them this admission must be stated in clear and unqualified terms ; our reluctance to undertake a heavy responsibility must be set forth<sup>3</sup>. The delay of a few days is not important as I may hear from Sir John Hobhouse by the mail hourly expected.*

I am not aware by what formal proceedings the Ranee became Regent—I assume by the unquestioned and natural position in which she stood as Mother and Guardian of the Prince.

If the Sirdars and influential Chiefs and especially the Attareewalla family, urge the B. Govt. to be the Guardian of the Maha-raja during his minority, the Ranee's power will cease silently and quietly, the admission being recorded that the B. Govt. as the Guardian of the Boy and administering the affairs of the State is to exercise all the functions and possess all the Power of the Regent, acting on behalf of the Prince.

The family of the betrothed Infant, by being introduced into the Durbar or Council will represent the interests of both the Infants, and the more Singhs you have the better.

Lena S. Majitia ought also to be invited—and I presume the simplest construction of a Govt. will be, that each member will be in charge of a Dept., reporting to the B. Resident or Minister and taking his orders on all occasions when he may deem it his Duty to interfere.

Tej S. to be continued as C. C. and probably Dewan Dina Nath for the *present* (*sic*). He is able enough to thwart and disturb the measures of the Govt. and the powers of effecting

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3. Here, as elsewhere in the following pages, all italics are mine.—J.M.

changes in the Council must rest with the B. Government and Resident.....

I hear from all quarters that nothing could exceed the admirable manner in which you conducted the whole of the Proceedings.

As to Col. Goldie, I have reported his name to the Chairman and recd. his answer, as well as Maddocks, that he is probably as good a Mily. Auditor Genl. as I would find and when Melvill's case was before me I mentioned his name to you, Stuart and Benson.

It is an affair long ago decided upon, and Wood's letter was written before the trial was closed.

The Mofussilite seems to have very good information from Lahore.

John L. has set off this morning to bring up his wife from Jullundhur.

He is stout agt. annexation.

Let me know the arrival of this letter. The Suwar will start at 11 precisely.

Yours my dear Currie Ever very truly

HARDINGE.

P. S. I have omitted to say I shall be delighted to see Lawrence if you think it will be politic that he shd. be away from Lahore at the same time with you. You are the best judge of this from the temper of the people you have to deal with.

I suppose Diwan D. Nath is at the bottom of the affair.

II.

(4)

Camp Bhyrowal, Decr., 12th, 1846.

11 o'clock a.m.

Date the *hours* in your letters. ✓

My dear Currie

I have received Lawrence's official Letter of the 10th and yours' of the 11th transmitting it at 8 o'cl. this morning. It is quite shameful the slovenly manner in which this Dawk Duty is performed. My letter of the 10th appears to have taken 18 hours instead of 8 or 10 hours.

I have private letter from you of the 11th.

I send this by express to desire that the Regt. of N. I., the 2

guns and the Irreg. Cav. escorting Lal Singh may not return to Lahore.

These troops will cross the Sutlege and encamp at Feroz-poor till further orders, and the troops ordered from Ferozpoor to Kussoor will be countermanded.

*My object is to give the Lahore Durbar a hint, that the Garrison is on the move.*

I also authorize you to send away another Regt. of N. Inf. from Lahore to Ferozpoor, there to encamp till further orders and not to be relieved by any other Regt. from Ferozpoor.

H. M. 80th Regt. will receive orders to be ready to march for Meerut at any moment. H. M. 10th are at Ferozpoor ready to relieve them, but will not move up till ordered, nor will it transpire that they are intended to relieve the 80th. *These announcements will be made to accelerate the Durbar decision.*

In selecting the 2nd Regt. of N. I. which is to march on Ferozpoor, the move ought to be made *by the Regt. which has the longest march into the interior of Hindostan.*

I send you a copy of a letter from the C.C. on this subject, but I have no List of the Stations to which the Lahore Regts. are proceeding when they cross the Sutlege.

I enclose a note from Lord Gough which you will send with a note from yourself in case you deem it expedient to send away a second Regt. not forgetting that these 2 Regts., Cavy. and Artly., sent from Lahore are not to be relieved *at present* from Ferozpoor.

I recommend that Lal S. should not loiter at Ferozpoor—but proceed at easy stages with a Cavalry Escort to Agra, consulting the Raja's convenience—travelling by Kurnaul &c., so as to avoid Umballa and any of the Great Stations.

I am afraid your *private* Letter to me has not been sent or has been lost.

Edwards met the Camel Sowar, took the Despatches and opened them, but there was no private letter for me.

*Persevere in your line of making the Sikh Durbar propose the condition or rather their readiness to assent to any conditions imposed as the price of the continuance of our support.*

*In the preamble of the Supplementary Arts. this solicitation must clearly be their act.*

Yours my dear Currie very truly  
HARDINGE.

(5)

Camp Bhyrowall  
Dec. 14th 1846  
12 o'cl. a.m.

My dear Currie

I have this morning received your note of the 13th.

I propose to move on Thursday to Soorkhpoor on the high road from Umritsar to Kupurtulla and about 5 Cos higher up the River.

If you meet Mrs. Currie at Umritsar on Wednesday, you can breakfast with me on Thursday, returning to Lahore Friday or Saturday.

This day and tomorrow will enable you to form a pretty accurate judgement of the progress you are likely to make.

I authorize you to desire Sir John Littler to move all the Troops out of Lahore (by) the end of the week, on the day you may judge to be the most expedient (except the 80th) encamping them as near as may be convenient to the Citadel. *If this hint should be unnecessary by the temper of the Chiefs to assent to our views, it will not be made.*

If your early return to Lahore should be desireable, which it probably will be, I will ride early on Thursday morning to Jundialah and meet you there, sending a breakfast first, and a troop of the Body Guard the night before. In the evening I can move on Soorkhpoor, and be there to dinner whilst you return to Lahore.

The ride will do me good, and in this camp my movements need not be known. I shall consider this plan as settled, unless I hear good reasons for changing it on Wednesday morning.

At any rate this Camp will move on Thursday morning.

*The guarantee to the Chiefs of their Jagheers by B. occupations, must I should think be a powerful stimulus to ensure their adhesion to the conditions imposed.*

The B. Govt. must insist on the immediate disbandment of all Sikh forces, exceeding 32,000 fixed by Treaty. The Irregular Cavalry, and Van Cortlandt's men, and also Lal Singh's Affghans must be got rid of in any event.

Was there ever any public act by which the Rancee was recognized as Regent?

The Billings gate in which she has indulged, the anti-English side she has taken, and the scandalous profligacy of her conduct, as the mother of all the Sikhs, ought to induce the Chiefs to have no compunction in depriving her of Power.

I need not enter upon these matters with which you are so familiar.

The mail was due 5 days at Bombay. I fear some accident has delayed the steamer.

Yours Very Sincerely  
HARDINGE.

(6)

Camp at the Bridge of Bhyrowal,  
December 14, 1846  
5 o'clock P.M.

My dear Currie

I have received your letter of 8 o'cl. this morning.

The Durbar and Chiefs, acting for the interests of the Maha-raja and the welfare of the people, must exercise their own judgement and foresight in deciding upon the course which they may deem it to be most safe and wise to adopt at the present conjuncture.

It is my positive determination not to employ a British Garrison in carrying on a Native administration in the Punjab, of which we have recently experienced so many instances of inefficiency, injustice and intrigue. I therefore will not consent to lend the aid of British troops to support a system on which no reliance can be placed.

The responsibility of the consequences which may result by the withdrawal of the troops will rest upon their heads.

*The proposal made of the aid of two Regts. of Inf., one of Cav., and one Battery of Artillery is so absurd, that I consider it as*

*equivalent to a desire to undertake the management of their own affairs without our intervention.*

The Chiefs are the sole judges in this affair. I am ready to withdraw every man in faithful observance of the Treaty, and altho' I do not say that modifications in the Instructions may not be sanctioned by me, after a full and deliberate hearing of the reasons which the Chiefs may have to allege in favour of any alteration, nevertheless I will not consent to a force less in amount than 9 Battns. of Inf.—with the present force of Artlly. and Cavly. remaining at Lahore.

I am the best judge of what force I consider it prudent to retain at Lahore, and you may rest their rejection of my conditions on the preliminary question of the number of troops required for the occupation.

The 9 Battns. may be reduced at the same time with other portions of the Inf. force to 800 r. and f. each, but those details are not dependent upon their consent. The sum to be paid will be independent of the no. of men to avoid all cavil, and the force will be kept up or not to 10,000 men, as the British Govt. may from time to time determine.

I would recommend you to take up your ground on the amount of force and the amount of money to be paid by the Lahore Govt. for its expense, before you enter into other matters.

I have written to you without an instant of hesitation as to the course to be pursued, and I authorize you to leave Lahore if on these two points you cannot obtain satisfactory answers.

Yours my dear Currie  
Very truly  
HARDINGE.

(7)

Camp Bhyrowal,  
December 16th (1846).  
3 o'clock P.M.

My dear Currie

I have received your letter of the 15th in the morning written before the conference with the Sirdars, and the translated copy of the Persian Paper which you had laid before them, con-

taining the conditions—and I have also received your letter of the 15th written *after* the meeting with the Sirdars which reached me at 8 o'clock this morning.

The result deserves my most unqualified approbation—and I shall be happy to record another instance of approved ability, zeal, temper and judgement you have shown, aided by the local experience, reputation and well established influence of Lt. Col. Lawrence, whenever I receive your official report. It is quite impossible to have brought this affair to a more satisfactory conclusion.

Your intimate knowledge of my sentiments, and the concurrence of our views in Punjab politics, have enabled you most successfully to realize all the objects I had in view, not only in the substance of the arrangements made, but in the form of the proceeding—for you have conducted this matter so judiciously that the truth and sincerity of the Policy cannot be brought into doubt or the Honor of the British Govt. suffer any impeachment. This Hindoo State has another opportunity afforded to it, of re-establishing its Govt. and at the same time of securing by honourable means the tranquility of this frontier, and I may hope of all India.

The moral effect of the Sikh Chiefs entreating the B. Govt. to become the Guardian of their Prince, by the continuance of a British Garrison at Lahore, and our consent to undertake the responsible charge must be felt throughout Asia in raising the reputation and extending the influence of the B. character.

Personally I may regret that it has not been my fate to plant the B. standard on the banks of the Indus. I have taken the less ambitious course, and I am consoled by the reflexion that I have acted right for the Interests of England and of India.

Be the judgement what it may, as far as I am concerned the struggle between Mily. feeling and Political duty is over—and I will refer to matters of business.

I quite concur in the trifling reduction to which you very properly consented in the Sum to be paid for the Troops.



The point which may admit of some discussion relates to the disposal of the Ranee.

It is quite proper and agreed upon between us, that the Lady should no longer exercise any power as Regent.

The question is limited to the amount of the Sum to be given for the suitable maintenance of the Maha-raja's mother and the place of her residence.

The diminished revenue of the State must be considered in apportioning the Sum and this can be adjusted by the Chiefs at once.

As to her residence there is an objection to separate her from her son on the ground of her political intrigues, counter-acting the measures of the new Govt., as it may be said (and obtain sympathy), that she is punished in anticipation of any political offence which she has committed.

I am (of) opinion that she will be more harmless at Lahore than in any other part of the Punjab. If she should become troublesome and her expatriation be justified, she must be sent across the Sutlege, in which case she might perhaps be domiciled in the Raja of Ladwa's House and occasionally see Her Son. As Runjeet's Wife, and the mother of the Prince and of *all the Sikhs*! I am disposed to act with caution, altho' the notoriety of her profligacy by itself would form a strong case of justification. I don't think she would find an Alderman Wood to conduct her in triumph through the Streets of Lahore.

I have just seen John Lawrence. He seems to be of opinion that the new arrangement ought to be signed by the Maha-raja coming to this camp and seeking me, followed by my paying him in return a friendly visit at Umritsir or Lahore. I should prefer this course, because I should like with Sir J. Littler and Lawrence to visit the Works at Lahore and make an arrangement better calculated to keep the sepoys and the towns-people separated . . .

In the long run depend upon it the towns-people will like us the better, the more we are kept separate and distinct from them.

(Then follow details of the movement of troops.)

If there should be any feeling that the distance is too great or the submission of signing the Treaty in the B. territory an act of indignity, I am quite ready to go to Umritsir—but after the Cashmeer affair, I rather think the meeting here is the most politic course. Settle it as you think best after consultations with the Chiefs.

(Here follow details regarding the movement of the Governor-General's camp as well as of the troops.)

I shall also pay the C.C. the compliments of asking H.E. to come across the River to be present at the signature of the new Arts. of Arrangement, with a flying Camp and half a dozen Offrs.

Sir John Littler I beg may be invited.

Inform His Lordship of your intended movement and the decision whether the Maha-raja comes on only to Umritsir or to this camp.

I will confer with you when we meet as to my future movements, after matters have been settled with the Sikhs.

As Mrs. Currie is sure to see Umritsir in any case, I shall dissuade her from meeting you at Umritsir.

Again, my dear Currie, let me express the cordial and affectionate regard for all the valuable services you render to me and above all to the State.

In closely examining this piece of diplomatic work, I cannot find that you have omitted a single point.

Remember me very kindly to Lawrence. I rather think his Brother would be well-placed at Peshawar, from his knowledge of Affghans and the respect in which he is held by them.

Yours very sincerely  
HARDINGE.

### III. CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO THE SO-CALLED SECOND SIKH WAR

#### A. INTRODUCTION

Lord Hardinge laid down the reins of his office in January 1848, and was succeeded by Lord Dalhousie, whose continuous

policy during the eight years he held his high office, was, in his own words, to seize all "rightful opportunities of acquiring territory or revenue as may from time to time present themselves." Hardly had he been for four months in India, when news reached him of the outbreak at Multan (May 1848). This gave him the "rightful opportunity" he was waiting for, and it was deliberately decided to delay operations against Multan<sup>4</sup>, so that the local outbreak there should spread far enough to provide the British Government with a *fair* excuse for annexing the Punjab, or, to use a metaphor, "the Government of India had decided to let the Punjab abscess come to a head, and when ripe to lance it freely in the coming cold weather."

This decision was arrived at against the repeated requests of the men on the spot to speed up measures against Multan. But Lord Dalhousie was in no mood to take any notice of such suggestions and any one who dared suggest the adoption of such a course received a rebuff from the Governor-General (No. 8). He was biding time, and when Sher Singh left Herbert Edwardes to join his father Chatar Singh<sup>5</sup>, Lord Dalhousie found his opportunity (No. 9), and on 3 October 1848, he desired his Secretary to *secretly and confidentially* intimate to Currie, who was at that time the Resident at Lahore, that he (*i.e.*, Dalhousie) considered "the State of Lahore to be to all intents and purposes, directly at war with the British Government." The private letters of Currie (Nos. 10 and 11), which he wrote to Lords Dalhousie and Gough as soon as he received this despatch, show clearly the absurdity of this declaration of war against "the State of Lahore,"

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4. The British Government was treaty-bound to quell the outbreak at Multan, for, according to the Bhyrowal Treaty which gave the British Resident at Lahore "unlimited authority in all matters of internal administration and external relations during the Maharaja's minority," a British force was in the Punjab for "*preservation of the peace of the country*," for which service the British Government pocketed twenty-two lakhs of rupees a year.

5. For circumstances leading to Sher Singh's adoption of such a course and for further details in general on this subject, see *The Defection of Sher Singh—A Historical Revision*, *The Outbreak at Multan, 1848*, and *The Myth of the Second Sikh War*, by the present writer in June 1946, June 1945 and February 1945 issues respectively of *The New Review*.

is also the anomalous position in which it placed the Resident who was the virtual ruler of "the State of Lahore," carrying on the administration of the State in the name of the infant Maharaja by virtue of the treaty of Bhyrowal, and in unaltered accordance with the terms of that treaty. In order to obviate this difficulty, the Resident suggested that *no open declaration of war should be made* till the British were strong enough to do so.

## B. LETTERS

(8)

*Private*

Dalhousie to Currie; Government House, *August 22, 1848.*

.... Lt. Edwardes I observe notices the prevalence of a feeling that the British Govt. will hold the Punjab to have been forfeited and urges a declaration to the contrary, in order to shew that the Govt. will keep good faith and adhere to the Treaty. The only inference to be drawn from this passage is that Edw. desires to express an opinion that however one party to a treaty disregard and violate its provisions, the other party must continue to observe it, or be guilty of a breach of faith; and 2 (ndly) that if the Punjab is held forfeited, that then the British Govt. will not have kept good faith.

Lt. Edwardes possibly meant this as a private letter; he should have marked it accordingly. Should he have intended it to be an official, it would be a friendly act if you or some of his well wishers would point out to him that for an assistant to the Resident to transmit to his Govt. a volunteer (*sic*) opinion that they would be guilty of breach of faith if they adopt a particular policy, which the Government of India, Her Majesty's ministers, and the Secret Cee. all contemplate as probable is hardly discreet, quite unbecoming and altogether unnecessary. ....

(9)

*Private*

Dalhousie to Currie; Government House, *October 8, 1848.*

.... The rebellion of Raja Sher Sing followed by his army;

the rebellion of Sirdar Chuttur Sing with the Durbar army under his command, the state of the troops and of the Sikh population everywhere, have brought matters to that crisis I have for months been looking for; and we are now, not on the eve of but, in the midst of a war with the Sikh nation and the Kingdom of the Punjab.

The result of this mad movement to the people and dynasty of the Sikhs can be no longer matter of discussion or of doubt.

To the last I have sought honestly to give effect to a policy which I approved. I have sought to avoid war or conquest. I now seek no longer to pursue a policy which I am satisfied can never be successful, and I have resolved to prosecute with vigor a war which on the part of the Govt. of India I had hoped to have avoided. The Sikhs have forced me, for this Govt., again to draw the sword, and I beg you to interpret my words in their clearest and most emphatic meaning when I say that being compelled to it I *have* drawn the sword, and have thrown away the scabbard, both in relation to the war immediately before us, and to the stern policy which that war must precede and establish. . .

The C.-in-C. has submitted two alternative plans for operations in the Punjab. I have told H. E. that I recognize no alternative plan. I have told him that as long as there is a shot in the Indian arsenals and a finger to pull a trigger, I will never desist from the siege of Mooltan until the fort is captured and the army as an army utterly destroyed.

The Sikh army and the whole Sikh population will, as a matter of course after the retirement from Mooltan, rise against us so far as their means will admit. Their army must be destroyed as an army, and their people deprived for ever of all means of making war.

To this end the Govt. of India has ordered their army to be again augmented. I am sending more troops from Bengal to be replaced by Regts. of Madras, and everything has been done which is in our power. In three days I leave Calcutta for the frontier and shall come as rapidly as I may.

Every one of us must exert himself to the utmost; for this business, as it is to be done, must be done promptly, fully and finally. . .

(10)

*Private*

Currie to Dalhousie ; Lahore, October 12, 1848.

. . . . I have to-day received the letter of Government of 3rd instant, No. 376, the last para of which has a good deal puzzled me, as to the line which your Lordship wish me to take at the present time.

The letter says:—‘The Govr.-General-in-Council considers the State of Lahore to be, to all intents and purposes, directly at war with the British Government.’

*Now if that be the case, I, with my assistants, am in an anomalous position, as superintending and aiding the administration of the Lahore State ; and if I were to withdraw from the Government, and to declare the Treaty violated and all amicable relations between the two States at an end, we should have the whole country up at once as one man to destroy us if possible. There is no doubt that all, with a very few exceptions are, at this time, Chiefs, Army and People inimical, aye hostile to us in their hearts, and desire to get rid of us ; but there is a portion who, doubting the success of the present movement, and conscious of the inability of the parties concerned, or any of the parties to combine conflicting interests, or to form a Government if they could get rid of us, continue neutral, and to a certain extent loyal, that they may preserve their Jagheers and property and may escape the ruin which the failure of the present movement must, they know, bring on those concerned in it.*

I only know of two parties who are, as I firmly believe, heartily with us from goodwill towards us. These are Raja Tej Sing and Misr Mella Ram and his sons. Fakeer Noorooddeen and his family are with us from the hatred of strife and contention, and the love of peace and security ; they have moreover, no fellowship with the Sikhs. Raja Deena Nath is, I think, with us from fear of the other factions, who are most violent against him, and, as he has lately discovered beyond doubt, thirsting for his blood—

and from sagacity. The remainder are our apparent friends (and they are still many), and are so merely while we remain strong, and from motives of direct self-interest that they may save their property. The Sirdars who refused to go over to Moolraj or who having been forced over deserted the cause, did so, not for love for us or for the present administration but from hatred to Shere Singh and doubt of his success.

Since the division amongst our adversaries, let it arise from what cause it may, is strength to us, *and we are not as yet in a position to relinquish which it gives us (sic).*

I should mention, however, that tho' there is scarcely any one who cares about little Dhuleep Singli, in the family of Runjeet Singh, yet as he has been recognized as the nominal and *de jure* sovereign by them *and this Government is still carried on in his name*, they continue a passing allegiance to him, having no one to whom to transfer such allegiance if they rebel against him.

This is the present state of things, and thus they should, I think, remain *until the Government is prepared to declare* that the conduct of the Lahore State has dissolved all existing engagements by the violation of the Treaty on which they were based; and the course for the future Administration of the Punjab, which the Government has determined to pursue. *This declaration should not be made till the Commander-in-Chief is in a commanding attitude, at Lahore*, and the sooner H. E. is here, with, at any rate, a portion of his army, the more easily will all the future operations of the Punjab be conducted. I think that the declaration to be made by the Government should be to the purport above expressed, very briefly recapitulating the nature of our position here, and the circumstances by which the treaty of amity and friendship, on which our relations with the State of Lahore are based, has been violated, setting forth that the British Government will now occupy the Punjab Province, with its own troops, and district officers, making such arrangements for the future administration of the country, as may seem to it fit and proper—that all consideration will be paid to the interests of Maharaja Dhuleep Singh, who, from his tender years cannot be held personally res-

ponsible for the misconduct of the Lahore State ; and that the just rights and property of those who have been in no way concerned in the hostile proceedings, and who do good and faithful service at this juncture, will be respected.

*I think that in the first instance nothing more explicit of the Government intentions need be proclaimed, and that this proclamation should not be made till we are in circumstances to follow it up.* In the mean time I have done and will do nothing to pledge the Government to any line of policy, or in any way be eventually determined to adopt. *I think we may quietly annex the Punjab districts to the British Provinces, making a suitable provision for the state and comfort of Maharaja Dhuleep, who may continue to occupy the Palace in the Fort of Lahore, the Fort being in our possession, in the manner described in the papers lately sent to Your Lordship.*

We are still safe and tolerably quiet at Lahore, but the insurrection is spreading all round us. . . .

(11)

*Confidential*

Currie to Gough; Lahore, October 13, 1848.

I have not heard from Your Lordship for a long time.

The tenor of a letter from the Govt. of India dated 3rd Instant, received yesterday, makes it more than ever desirable, that we should be in as commanding a position as we can at Lahore, at the earliest possible date. The 5th Para of the Govt. letter is as follows :

“I am directed to intimate to you, that the Govr-General-in-Council considers the State of Lahore to be, to all intents and purposes, directly at war with the British Government; and he expects that those who may be directly or indirectly concerned in these proceedings, will be treated accordingly. . . .”

Now we are not in a position for me to make known to the State of Lahore, this opinion of the British Government. At present, I and my assistants and the British Garrison, are here for the purpose of aiding by superintendence, advice and protection, the maintenance of the Lahore State and its administration.



We cannot continue to protect and maintain a state which we declare to be at war with us ; and we are not in that commanding or strong position here which would enable us to take the steps such a declaration would render necessary . . .

## IV. EPILOGUE

### A. INTRODUCTION

Needless to say that this course of duplicity and chicanery suggested by Currie was adopted in its entirety by the British Government, and no open declaration of war was made with a view to minimise opposition and to retain the influence of the Durbar and the services of many of the Durbar troops. The nadir of this double-dealing was reached in the two proclamations, issued by the British Government on 18 November 1848 and 5 February 1849 (Nos. 12 and 13), by which the people of the Punjab were informed that the British army "*has entered the Lahore territories, not as an enemy to the constituted Government, but to restore order and obedience!*" These proclamations were naturally meant to be an eye-wash ; and when the treaty of guardianship had been turned to the fullest account, with the Maharaja's troops and resources, for the suppression of the rebellion,<sup>6</sup> Lord Dalhousie turned round after the insurrection had been put an end to, declared the Treaty invalid, and explained that the successful campaign, professedly undertaken to quell a rebellion against the Government of Maharaja Dalip Singh and to put down "all armed opposition to the constituted authority,"

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6. Out of the eight members of the Council of Regency, six—viz., Raja Dina Nath, Raja Tej Singh, Fakir Nurud'din, S. Shamsher Singh Sindhianwala and S. Attar Singh Kaliwala—remained faithful to their treaty obligations, and continued to assist the Resident in restoring order and obedience to the last. The question of their being unfaithful to the British Government during the "Second Sikh War," therefore, does not arise at all. The seventh member, Ranjor Singh Majithia, was merely suspected of being against the British ; while only Sher Singh took part against them, and that too when he was thoroughly provoked and after he had realized that the Sikh sovereignty was doomed.

was really a war against the Maharaja and the State of Lahore, whereby the British Government had "conquered" the Punjab. The sarcastic and humorous, but nevertheless true, remarks on the transaction by Ludlow, a British historian of India (No. 14), sum up the situation better than pages of criticism can do.

## B. RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

(12)

Proclamation by the Resident at Lahore, dated 18 November 1848.

"To the subjects, servants, and dependents of the Lahore State, and the residents, of all classes and castes, whether Sikh, Mussalman, or other, within the territories of Maharaja Dalip Singh, from the Beas to the mountains beyond Peshawar.

"Whereas certain evil-disposed persons and traitors, have excited rebellion and insurrection, and have seduced portions of the population of the Punjab from their allegiance, and have raised an armed opposition to the British authority; and whereas the condign punishment of the insurgents is necessary; therefore, the British army, under the command of the Right Honourable the Commander-in-Chief, has entered the Punjab districts. *The army will not return to its cantonments until the full punishment of all insurgents has been effected, all opposition to constituted authority put down, and obedience and order has been re-established.*

"And whereas it is not the desire of the British Government that those who are innocent of the above offences, who have taken no part, secretly or openly, in the disturbances, and who have remained faithful in their obedience to the Government of Maharaja Dalip Singh, be they Sikh, or be they of any other class, should suffer with the guilty; therefore, all persons who are not concerned directly or indirectly, in the present disturbances, are assured that they have nothing to fear from the coming of the British army. Such persons are exhorted to remain, without apprehension, in their villages and homes, and, as loyal subjects of the Maharaja, to give every aid by providing carriage, supplies, and the

*army which has entered the Lahore territories, not as an enemy to constituted Government, but to restore order and obedience . . . .*"

## (13)

Extract of proclamation by the Resident at Lahore, dated February 1849.

"A proclamation was issued by Sir Frederick Currie, on the 18th of November last. I (*i.e.*, Henry Lawrence) now, *again* make known, by order of the Governor-General, the terms on which alone pardon may still be obtained."

## (14)

Extract from Ludlow, *British India*, ii, p. 166, quoted in *The Maharaja Duleep Singh and the Government* (London, 1884) p. 48.

"Dalip Singh was an infant, his minority was only to end in 1854. We were his declared protectors. On our last advance into his country we had proclaimed (18th November 1848) that we came to punish insurgents and to put down all 'armed opposition to constituted authority.' We fulfilled that pledge by annexing his whole country within six months. On the 24th (*sic*) March 1849<sup>7</sup> the Kingdom of the Punjab was declared to be at an end; the child, our protégé, was pensioned off: all State property confiscated to the Company, the celebrated diamond, the Koh-i-Noor surrendered to the Queen. In other words, we 'protected' our ward by taking his whole territory from him.

".... Having once recognized and undertaken to protect Dalip Singh, it was a mockery to punish him for the faults of his subjects. As between us and him in putting down insurrection, we were simply fulfilling our duty towards him. No such act on the part of his subjects could give us any title against him. Fancy, if you can, a widow lady with a houseful of mutinous servants who turn out and attack the police. The police knock them on the head, walk into the house, and kindly volunteer to protect the mistress against any violence on their part. A quarrel again breaks out, the truncheons are again successful, and

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7. Obviously a misprint; it should be 29th March 1849.

the inspector now politely informs the lady that her house and the estate on which it stands are no longer her own, but will be retained in fee simply by the police ; that on turning out she will receive an annuity equal to about one and six pence in a pound of her rental, and that she must hand over for the use of the Chief Commissioner her best diamond necklace. Is this an exaggerated version of our conduct towards that innocent boy Dalip Singh now grown into a Christian gentleman ? ”